

King's son says he believes Ray is innocent

By Richard Willing
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a Tennessee prison hospital.

The son of the late Martin Luther King Jr. met face-to-face with his father's convicted assassin Thursday and said for the first time that the King family believes he is innocent.

"I want you to know I believe you and my family believes you," Dexter King told James Earl Ray, who is serving a 99-year sentence for the civil rights leader's 1968 murder.

The televised meeting took place in

The statement could increase pressure to grant a trial to Ray, who pled guilty in 1969 to shooting King, then changed his mind. He was not allowed to restore his innocent plea.

"It's tremendously important ... a galvanizing event," said Philip Melanson of the University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth, a critic of the assassination investigation. "It's the King family saying: 'there are people still out there who killed our father.' How can that ... be allowed to stand?"

Ray, 68, is said to be dying of liver disease. Tennessee's Court of Criminal Appeals is considering his request for a trial. Prosecutors in Memphis, where King was killed April 4, 1968, are opposed.

King, who wants a trial, told Ray Thursday that meeting him helped him complete a journey. Looking Ray in the eye, King said, convinced him Ray was telling the truth.

Memphis Deputy District Attorney John Campbell called King's statement "amazing" and "discouraging."



By Earl Warren, AP

First: Dexter King, son of Martin Luther King, meets father's convicted killer, James Earl Ray.

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